



**ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS**  
**GREG ABBOTT**

July 1, 2004

Mr. Thomas E. Shute  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of San Antonio  
P.O. Box 839966  
San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966

OR2004-5365

Dear Mr. Shute:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 204254.

The City of San Antonio (the "city") received a request for information regarding the identities of individuals who complained of ordinance violations at a specified residence. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information consists of completed investigations and is therefore expressly public under section 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code, which provides, in pertinent part:

(a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108.

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). Therefore, the city may withhold the requested records only if they are made confidential under other law or are excepted by section 552.108 of the Government Code.

You claim that the identities of informers are protected from disclosure under the informer's privilege as incorporated into section 552.101 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." The informer's privilege has long been recognized by Texas courts. *See Aguilar v. State*, 444 S.W.2d 935, 937 (Tex. Crim. App. 1969); *Hawthorne v. State*, 10 S.W.2d 724, 725 (Tex. Crim. App. 1928); *see also Roviato v. United States*, 353 U.S. 53, 59 (1957). The informer's privilege under *Roviato* exists to protect a governmental body's interest. Therefore, the informer's privilege under *Roviato* may be waived by a governmental body and is not "other law" that makes the information confidential under section 552.022. Open Records Decision No. 549 at 6 (1990).

However, the informer's privilege is also found in Rule 508 of the Texas Rules of Evidence. The Texas Supreme Court has held that "[t]he Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and Texas Rules of Evidence are 'other law' within the meaning of section 552.022." *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001). Thus, we will determine whether the informers' identities are made confidential under Rule 508.

Rule 508 provides, in relevant part:

(a) Rule of Privilege. The United States or a state or subdivision thereof has a privilege to refuse to disclose the identity of a person who has furnished information relating to or assisting in an investigation of a possible violation of a law to a law enforcement officer or member of a legislative committee or its staff conducting an investigation.

(b) Who May Claim. The privilege may be claimed by an appropriate representative of the public entity to which the information was furnished, except the privilege shall not be allowed in criminal cases if the state objects.

Thus, an informer's identity is confidential under Rule 508 if a governmental body demonstrates that an individual has furnished information relating to or assisting in an investigation of a possible violation of a law to a law enforcement officer conducting an investigation, and the information does not fall within an exception to the privilege enumerated in Rule 508(c). You state that the Code Compliance Department is charged with enforcement of San Antonio's City Code provisions, including a code provision that renders the creation or allowance of an animal nuisance a violation punishable by fine. In this instance, you indicate that citizen complaints to "law enforcement officers" led to the Code Compliance Department's investigations of alleged animal nuisance violations. However, you do not inform us, and it is not otherwise clear to this office, that the "officers" to whom

the alleged violations were reported are “law enforcement officers” for purposes of Rule 508. Thus, none of the submitted information is confidential under Rule 508, and the city must release all submitted information to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

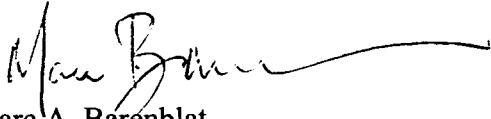
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep’t of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Barenblat", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marc A. Barenblat  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

MAB/jh

Ref: ID# 204254

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Laurie Flores  
c/o Mr. Thomas E. Shute  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of San Antonio  
P.O. Box 839966  
San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966  
(w/o enclosures)